

Dr. H. Clifford Lane

H. Clifford Lane, M.D.



Dr. Clifford Lane came to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in 1979 to do basic research on the immune system. In the early 80s, when he got his first look at the immune systems of people with AIDS, he noticed that despite lacking helper T cells, these people had markedly hyper-reactive B cells—the cells that make antibodies. “The B cells of these patients were just incredibly turned on,” he says. Because he had been studying B-cell activity in other immune diseases, this observation sparked his interest in AIDS. Shortly after, Dr. Lane became a prominent member of a “grassroots” team of scientists who came together to study this strange new disease.

Because NIH researchers enjoy the freedom to pursue new interests, this scientific team could respond quickly to the AIDS threat, Dr. Lane says. While some researchers searched for a cause, Dr. Lane concentrated on understanding the immune system abnormalities in people with AIDS and looked for ways to stop the disease. Working with Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Dr. Lane became the first to attempt bone marrow and white blood cell transfers from healthy twins to their identical siblings with AIDS as a therapeutic strategy. He also explored alpha interferon and interleukin-2 as possible AIDS treatments. Although the twin studies didn't yield a practical therapy, Dr. Lane's work increased understanding of the nature of the immune system abnormalities of AIDS in important ways, and his work with IL-2 continues to the present day.

Dr. Lane relates a story about his attempts to investigate the gay tourist trade in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, during an official trip there in 1983. Braving nightclub bouncers armed with handguns and guided only by a reluctant cab driver through blackout-darkened city streets, Dr. Lane tried to ascertain the effect of AIDS on Port-au-Prince's largely underground gay population.

As clinical director of NIAID, Dr. Lane continues to search for better AIDS treatments and to better understand the nature of the immune system abnormalities associated with HIV infection.

Transcript of Interview:

Dr. Clifford Lane, M.D., March 12, 1990

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